

Conversation between
Lisette Lagnado,
 director of Escola de
 Artes Visuais do Parque Lage,
 and **Daniela Labra**,
 the fourth guest curator in the
 Visiting Curator program

Lisette Lagnado: The Visiting Curator program was created to foster curatorships that took a more experimental perspective, encouraging guest curators to question exhibition formats. Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage is a fitting site for this, with its aura of cultural effervescence since the 1970s and its 52 hectares of Atlantic forest. Would the exhibition you've conceived have been possible inside a museological institution, or did you devise it specially for an educational and research setting? What differences do you see?

Daniela Labra: I curated "After the Future" specifically for Parque Lage. I wanted to think about what authorship, criticism, and making and teaching art mean in the cultural, social, and political context today, which is as complex as it is unstable. From the outset, my goal was to build up a dialogical relationship between theoretical discourses and contemporary art practices and also to show how these practices respond to the future scenarios that are presented empirically, with such troubling prospects as water and food shortages, pandemics, ethnic wars... I've worked with the notion of future as a modernist utopia in a process of disintegration and loss of credibility: the future no longer as the advancement and progress of western civilization, but as a hazy image where the victory of civilized humans over nature or the savagery of vanquished peoples has not transpired as expected by European Enlightenment thinking.

My starting point was the post-doctorate I did at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro: "After the Future: ruins and reinventions of modernity in the contemporary arts." I worked with a variety of authors, including Marc Augé, David Harvey, Andreas Huyssen, Néstor García Canclini, Milton Santos, Gilberto Freyre, and Walter Benjamin, to reflect on questions as diverse as the place of art in post-modernity, the processes by which Brazilian society was built, or even the discussion of art as a consumer product in a scenario where immediatism reigns supreme. But despite this theoretical underpinning, the works aren't designed to serve as illustrations. The exhibition analyzes an array of ambiguities detected on a daily basis.

LL: Another idea behind the Visiting Curator program is to choose projects by some (at least five) of the students, supervise their work, and include them in a group show with artists who are already part of the

circuit, without distinguishing them hierarchically. This initiative is designed to forge a web of professional interchange in much the same way that at biennials we see young artists presenting their work alongside more established artists they admire. I'm reminded of the interest Gordon Matta-Clark's widow, Jane Crawford, had in Tomás Saraceno and Marcelo Cidade at the 27th São Paulo Biennial. Here, the students' work constitutes about a third of your exhibition. Do you think art should dispense with selection processes?

DL: Actually, there was a selection process, based on letters of intent. Once the group was formed, I presented the proposals of the artists I had already invited to take part in the exhibition. We worked as a study group, and this involved doing research into sociology, geography, aesthetics, biopolitics, and other humanities. The students would bring along questions, artists, reading matter, links, and had their work discussed by the group. For those that were interested in theory, I encouraged them to write about topics or works that inspired them during our sessions.

The exhibition itself reflects a significant sample of the web of interchanges that were set up. I've been developing a method for study dynamics for some five years now, leading art research groups independently. I've put on exhibitions that grew out of critical analyses of the students' work, and in every case we took the opportunity to view the exhibition-making process as an educational activity.

LL: To begin with, you wanted to focus all the students' work in one room in the mansion. Why was that?

DL: That's right. The project was going to take place in November 2015, and one of the galleries had been reserved to be occupied by the students in a process-oriented way. I imagined that "students' room" like a living space in the exhibition. The idea was to blend the curator's gaze with that of the teacher/proposer. But as the school had to postpone the exhibition to 2016, all the students occupied the Cavalariças gallery for one week last December. It turned into this big laboratory, giving a chance to test out some of the finished works and to have conversation sessions every day. So, that experimental room for the students took place there before the official event. It was fundamental for keeping everyone motivated while the schedule was altered because of financial difficulties. The new version lost some of its initial configuration, but it still has the idea of using the school in proposals that draw on different times and supports, including non-objectual ones, like performances, a festa, an internet platform, interventions in the park, and debates open to the public.

With the guest artists, I was careful to make sure the works interacted with one another, like a text responding to the topics. Building up

relationships between the works in an exhibition is one of the core responsibilities of a curator: to give the assembled set of works coherence. These works have a political, almost virulent nature, bringing together leading figures from the "niche" of political art, like Mexican artist Teresa Margolles and Brazilian artist Maria Thereza Alves, who now lives in Berlin. Most of the works directly address problematic current-day issues, although there are some more lyrical counterpoints, such as Zé Carlos Garcia's wooden objects on the wall and natural plumes, or the techno-scientific sculpture, *Equilibrium*, by Guto Nóbrega. Some of the works will be "sneaked in," using the pillars at the entrance or switching the toilet seats, as proposed by the young artist, Felipe Ferreira, who collects these kitsch furnishings decorated with artificial landscapes. There are some works I've known for years, like *We Support* [2007], by Runo Lagomarsino, and *Donde nada ocurre* [Where Nothing Happens, 2012], by Spanish artist Irene de Andrés. It's a real pleasure for me to present them here.

LL: What exhibitions have proved central to the development of your work as a curator?

DL: The exhibition that marked me most strongly before I was a curator was the Venice Biennale, which I happened upon in 1999 when I was backpacking alone round Europe. It was a real shock. The curator that year was Harald Szeemann, and years later I found out he was something of a groundbreaker for independent curatorship.

When I started working as a curator in 2005, one of the exhibitions that most marked me was "Populism," curated by Lars Bang Larsen, Cristina Ricupero, and Nicolaus Schafhausen, at Stedelijk Museum [Amsterdam], which investigated populism as a phenomenon in contemporary politics. Some of the works were acerbic, others were discursive, but they were all engaged; and there were lots of young artists alongside established names like Cildo Meireles and Sarah Morris. That event influenced me so much that in a way this exhibition, "After the Future," could be interpreted as a response to "Populism" ten years on.

LL: I didn't see "Populism," but the curators published a reader that became an historic document for understanding new social identities. The political philosophy of Ernesto Laclau about mass psychology and democracy investigates a neoliberal scenario in Latin America that's a far cry from the populism Brazil has experienced and is depicted in Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* [Land in Anguish, 1966]. For him, populism is a way of getting away from the neoliberal model. In *On Populist Reason*, he even argues that it's a phenomenon that has expanded the foundations of democracy. Would you say that "After the Future" also reflects people's bewilderment when faced with the void of political representation?

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DL: Yes. It's curious how the most politicized works in the exhibition, including the ones that speak out about a real situation (like the extinction of indigenous peoples, by Maria Thereza Alves), indicate some disillusionment with political parties. Meanwhile, artists like Jorge Menna Barreto, who investigates natural foods and the solidarity economy, demonstrate attitudes linked to alternatives that begin on the micro scale and can transform the social environment. It's as if these initiatives showed us that there is in fact a political void, and so it's down to us to find new forms of cooperation to overcome this frightening prospect.

As for neoliberal populism in Latin America and Brazil, it hailed increased consumption as the remedy for the problems of employment and income generation. It worked for a while, but here, for instance, what we're seeing now is streets choked with cars while public transportation is still underfunded. Education has never been a priority, and corruption has become endemic at every level and in every party. Yet despite this political void, there are still agendas identified with "left-wing" and "right-wing" leanings.

Glorifying neoliberalism and justifying environmental degradation and the excessive concentration of income as mere side-effects of economic growth and the well-being of the global population is a cynical, spurious discourse, because there are pockets of extreme poverty that are clearly growing all over the world. Of course I won't provide answers for all this. To paraphrase Leonilson, "Daniela can't change the world," but what we have here is a real platform for research at an art school, in this space where you can discuss ideas and throw some light on different kinds of political action, using art as a tool to sensitize the gaze and engender critical attitudes.

Visiting Curator

"Visiting Curator" is a program of exhibitions designed in 2015 in the form of a course open to students of Escola de Artes Visuais (EAV) Parque Lage. Its goal is to strengthen dialogue between the city's leading art education establishment and the artistic community and to help actively shape its cultural agenda.

Contemporary Art Practices is the new education program conceived in order to establish a link between the works produced at EAV with professional critics and writers, encouraging interchange between them. It is grounded in the belief that contact between different generations is a way for the school to broaden its social outreach.

Each visiting curator is invited to present their current interests and to give 40 hours of seminars, during which they provide guidance for students whose interests converge with their own. The work of at least five of these students must be included

LL: How do you interpret the frequent accusations voiced by critics that art exhibitions are getting more and more populist? Do the artists you've invited fit this context?

DL: That's got to do with the whole scene of making a spectacle out of culture. Museums and art events need numbers, and sponsors want results. So "special effects" or selfies standing in front of artworks are encouraged in educational actions that fail to really investigate the issues raised by artists. The message is upstaged. Even the international biennials end up promoting governments, corporations, and foundations run using private and public monies. I wonder whether there's any difference between the notions of populism of exhibitions and the so-called popularization of art. That's worth thinking about.

In countries where primary education is so undervalued and the visiting public for the visual arts is so limited, it's important to provide more access to museums and cultural centers, because they can actually produce initiatives of quality. But what I think is that the public tends to be patronized, encouraged to "understand" the artworks rather than reflect on them and develop their own critical viewpoint. It's the way people's gaze and thought processes are channeled that's populist and impoverishing. The artists I've invited here have absolutely nothing to do with this trend. Quite the contrary: they're critics of this phenomenon.

in their exhibition. In this way, EAV assumes an important stage in its students' development process by: providing for their future insertion in the art circuit.

Structured as a laboratory, the program features the work of young curators, inviting them to use the art school as a field for experimentation, without any concern for market demands, and to work alongside its teaching staff.

The exhibitions themselves occupy a variety of spaces: the Cavalariças gallery, the chapel, the grotto, the tower, the gardens, and other sheltered areas, interacting with the historical features of the Read office and green space, which the school has occupied since 1975.

Visiting curators in 2016:
Daniela Labra*, Marta Mestre*, Beatriz Lemos, Santiago García Navarro, Gabriel Bogossian.

* 2015 exhibitions postponed to the first half of 2016.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Everyone that attends 100% of the debates and lectures will receive a certificate of participation from Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage

Friday, March 4 - 7pm to 10pm

Jam session and installation: *Bonfire* by Isis Passos
Venue: Open air - Parque Lage

starting at 10pm

Happening-party: André Queiroz, *The Marvelous Church*
Venue in downtown area to be announced

Friday, March 11 - 7pm to 8.30pm

Conversation between Daniela Labra, visiting curator and Lisette Lagnado, director of EAV Parque Lage
Venue: Salão Nobre - Parque Lage

Friday, March 18 - 8pm to 10pm

Cine Lage with screening of films by Joana Traub Csekö and Pedro Urano, *Homage to Matta Clark*, 2015, and Pablo Lobato, *Winds of Valls*, 2013.
Venue: Swimming pool patio - Parque Lage

Monday, April 11 * - 5pm to 7pm

Debate: "Contemporary Brazil and the indigenous cause: a Conversation based on the installation, *The Artist as Bandeirante*" by Maria Thereza Alves
Poty Poran, Guarani Amerindian and teacher at Gwyrá Pepó Guarani Indigenous State School in the Tenode Porã village, São Paulo state and guests.
Venue: Salão Nobre - Parque Lage

7.30pm to 9pm

Lecture and book launch: *Between Monsters and Chimeras. Reflections on art, biology and technology.*
Raquel Rennó Nunes, professor at Universidade Federal do Recôncavo Baiano (UFRB) and Guto Nóbrega, artist and researcher da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)
Venue: Salão Nobre - Parque Lage

Tuesday, April 12 - 6pm to 7pm

Performance: *Cards on the Table* by Ricardo Cãstro
Venue: Cavalariças - Parque Lage

7.30pm to 9pm

Lecture and debate: "Counterculture in Brazil: utopias and legacies"
Frederico Coelho, writer, historian and professor at Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC - Rio)
Venue: Salão Nobre - Parque Lage

Monday, April 25 * - 5pm to 6.30pm

Performance *Trans Fat #5*, by Tamiris Spinelli
Venue: Open air - Parque Lage

7pm to 8.30pm

Lecture and debate: "The End of Love"
Charles Feitosa, philosopher, professor at Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Unirio).
Venue: Salão Nobre - Parque Lage

Tuesday, April 26 - 4pm to 6.30pm

"Poetics and Politics of the Body in Action." Discussion Forum on Art, Performance and Gender.
Tamiris Spinelli, artist and activist e and Caio Riscado, researcher in performance and gender studies and guests
Venue: Salão Nobre - Parque Lage

7pm to 8.30pm

Closing lecture: "The Many Deaths of Art"
Marisa Flórido, independent curator, critic, and professor at Instituto de Artes da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ)
Venue: Salão Nobre - Parque Lage

Sunday, May 1 - 3pm

Performance: *Cards on the Table*, by Ricardo Cãstro
Venue: Cavalariças - Parque Lage

* [Open to the public on these Mondays only, from 2pm to 7pm]